

NPA responds to debt crisis by promoting alliances with French bourgeois “left”

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France has been under pressure for several days from the financial markets, which are pushing President Sarkozy to deepen his social cuts, despite a second austerity plan presented by Prime Minister François Fillon last week. The reaction of the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and the trade unions is to prepare a day of action, bringing together all of the “left”.

This call for a broad gathering of the “left” is the NPA’s attempt to cover up its responsibility in the austerity projects of the government, and to channel workers’ anger towards support for the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS) in the 2012 presidential elections.

An article in *Le Monde* entitled “Investors are much more afraid of lending to France than to Germany” reports that the gap between interest rates on French government bonds and German bonds has greatly widened in 2011. It is a sign of investors’ distrust of France’s capacity to pay off its debts. The article draws a parallel between France and Italy, whose government has just fallen: “France’s situation more and more resembles that of Italy, which has seen its interest rates reach record levels”.

The Fillon government’s second austerity budget, in response to market fears, did not have the hoped-for effect; rumours that France risks losing its AAA credit rating are ever more insistent. *Le Monde* continues: “In financial circles, observers estimate that the distrust of financial markets is likely to increase in the run-up to the presidential elections.” The markets are intensifying pressure for the future president to apply the programme of the banks, pauperising the working class.

General Confederation of Labour (CGT) general secretary Bernard Thibault proposed “an urgent meeting [of the joint trade unions] to gauge the most adequate and necessary response”. The unions have proposed an isolated single day of action for December 13.

For decades, workers’ struggles have been betrayed by the unions, which organise days of action that have one goal: serving as a safety valve to demoralise workers. The union bureaucracy has no interest in blocking the reforms, because the “reforms” arise from negotiations between the unions and the government.

The NPA is party to this anti-worker political set-up, as its strategy is to work with the union bureaucracy and the bourgeois “left.” In an article in its *Tout est à nous* magazine, “Organise the response to Fillon and Sarkozy’s austerity”, the author writes: “the NPA proposes that the whole of the social and political left, the unions as well as parties, meet together in the next days.” He made no criticism of the treacherous role of the unions, nor of the political role of the Stalinist PCF.

The Left Front of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the PCF—with whom the NPA wishes to collaborate—is an agency of the Socialist Party (PS). Mélenchon, the Left Front’s presidential candidate, is a former PS minister. The PCF has been an ally of the PS for decades, depending financially and politically on it after having participated in several of its governments. Under the PS government of Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, the PCF sanctioned the sending of French troops to occupy Afghanistan, as well as numerous privatisations.

The Left Front has launched its “Front for Struggle and the Ballot Box” (“Front des luttes et des urnes”) a manoeuvre aimed at getting support in workplaces for its 2012 election campaign. Yves Cochin, a member of the Solidaires trade union and ex-NPA member, stated in connection with this “Front”: “between 1981 and 1936, we prefer 1936. And we will kick the backsides of those who say that they can’t carry out their [electoral] promises.”

This is just an attempt to hide the character of the Front for Struggle proposed by the PCF and implicitly supported by the NPA’s appeal to “all the social and

political left”. Cochin presents the question as if the PCF “would prefer” the general strike—which, in 1936, was declared against the Popular Front government, and against the wishes of the PCF—to its strategy of governmental collaboration with the PS, pursued since the election of President François Mitterrand in 1981 with the PCF’s support. In fact, these parties have neither the intention nor the capacity to organise a serious strike against the government.

After the Mitterrand era, the PCF and the NPA have depended closely on the financial, political and media support of the PS. They also depend on a union bureaucracy based on a small minority of the workers, which has demonstrated in several political struggles over the last 10 years its hostility to the perspective of a general strike against the state. If Cochin’s bluster about “kicking the backsides” of the ruling class actually disturbed the bourgeoisie, the leaders of the PCF would receive a discreet warning, and Mr. Cochin would end up being the one with a bruised backside.

In fact, the Front for Struggle created by the Left Front aims to ensure support for the PS and to avoid any open opposition by the working class to the austerity plans—a movement that would rightly turn against the union bureaucracy.

Contrary to what Yves Cochin implies, the semi-victory obtained by French workers during the 1936 General Strike (paid holidays, a 40-hour week) was partial and short-lived. Thanks to the decision of the PCF and the Stalinised Communist International to subordinate the working class to the Blum government, which they never tried to overthrow, the bourgeoisie was given the chance to prepare a counter-offensive against the working class. The revolutionary period in Europe and internationally necessitated the taking of power by the working class.

This offensive first took the form of the suppression of spontaneous independent workers’ strikes, then the increasingly favourable attitude of the French ruling class towards fascism. The consequence, at the start of World War II, was the capitulation of the Third Republic to the Nazi invasion, and the installation of the Pétain regime.

These historical experiences have a new pertinence today, amid the right-wing turn of European politics since the debt crisis first centred on Greece. Discussing the austerity plan adopted in Greece, which led to the dismissal of the military high command and a change of government—including the neo-fascists of LAOS—the NPA wrote: “These events demonstrate the urgency of breaking with capitalism, of refusing to pay off the debt, seizing the

banks, and raising wages.”

The NPA knows that the future French government, even if it is led by the French social democrats, will attempt to apply a similar policy to that of the Greek social democrats. The NPA claims it will be possible to put pressure on such a government to obtain favourable measures in the workers’ interests. This perspective is empty and groundless.

The NPA wants people to believe that one can force a government, for instance of the PS, to retreat with one-day protests organised by the unions. All the experiences of the recent period, as well as in 1936, show that this is not the case.

Following Sarkozy’s televised speech, François Hollande of the PS is presenting himself as the best candidate for the financial markets. He adopted a protectionist attitude towards China, deploring the loss of European sovereignty with regard to China.

In recent NPA articles on Greece, the NPA has consciously ignored the fact that Papandreou feared a military coup following his announcement of a referendum on the bailout plan of Brussels. The installation of a Greek coalition government composed of social democrats, conservatives, and the LAOS neo-fascists underlines more and more the right-wing character of all the bourgeois parties in Europe—whether of a conservative or social-democratic coloration.

The response of the NPA regarding the Sarkozy austerity plan consists of collaboration with the Stalinist milieu and, through them, with the PS. The working class in France and throughout the world must break with these organisations in a struggle for political power and the establishment of a worker’s state based on socialist policies.



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